

# Department of Human Services

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\*Important story at this spot

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(Be sure to maximize your screen to read your clips)

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# Murder trial to start with finger-pointing

**BY JACK KRESNAK**

FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER

*September 18, 2006*

With opening statements in her trial beginning today in Lansing, Lisa Holland -- charged in the murder of her 7-year-old adopted son, Ricky -- will most likely try to convince a jury of two things:

- That Ricky was an emotionally disturbed and difficult child who needed the psychotropic medications she gave him.
- That her husband, Tim Holland, who pleaded guilty to second-degree murder in Ricky's death and said his wife abused the boy for years and killed him with a hammer, is a liar who killed Ricky himself.



Ricky Holland's disappearance and death has been a high-profile tragedy since July 2005, when the Hollands said that the boy who came to live with them as a foster child in October 2000 had run away from their home near Williamston.

Detectives from the Ingham County Sheriff's Office and the Michigan State Police said they doubted the story almost immediately, but despite widespread searches for Ricky -- and background investigations into the Hollands, who also adopted Ricky's four biological siblings and then had a baby of their own -- there were few breaks in the case.

## When the case changed

Then, on Jan. 25, Tim Holland -- a civilian who worked as a counterintelligence analyst for the Army -- came home with a letter saying he had been fired, a situation that allegedly sparked a physical altercation with his wife.

That altercation led Tim Holland to go to police.

Two days later, after his lawyer secured what he thought was an ironclad immunity agreement, Tim Holland led police to Ricky's skeletal remains in a swampy area of a state game area south of Dansville, 13 miles from Williamston.

Charged with felony murder and first-degree child abuse, the couple faced a preliminary examination in Mason that stretched over several weeks last spring. During the proceedings, Tim Holland frequently wept, especially when witnesses testified that Ricky was fond of him.

Lisa Holland typically kept her composure -- though her lawyers, Andrew Abood and Mike Nichols, said she cried several times while hiding her face from cameras.

On Sept. 5, Tim Holland pleaded guilty to second-degree murder, admitting no direct connection to Ricky's death but acknowledging that he did nothing to help him and that he hid the body.

Agreeing to testify at his wife's trial, Tim Holland said his wife had "an immense hatred" for Ricky, and that she constantly berated him, hit him and tied him up.

He told a judge she once hit the boy so hard with a spoon that blood spattered on a wall. He described Ricky's living conditions as being "like a concentration camp."

He said he came home July 1, 2005, and found his wife agitated and Ricky in bed with red vomit on his shirt and no pulse. Holland said his wife was screaming, "I didn't mean to!"

### **The mother's defense**

Lisa Holland's lawyers won't say whether their 33-year-old client will testify at her trial, but she may have to if she hopes to convince the jury that her husband, 37, killed their son.

"Lisa maintains she is innocent in Ricky's death and in his abuse," Nichols said Sunday.

In his opening statement today, Nichols is expected to attack Tim Holland's statements to police -- including the one that led to his plea.

Prosecutors, meanwhile, will be concentrating on more than Tim Holland's testimony.

At the preliminary examination, Ingham County Assistant Prosecutor Mike Ferency presented testimony from witnesses who said that Lisa Holland appeared to act cruelly toward Ricky when he was a first-grader at Cascades Elementary School in Jackson, where the family lived until May 2005.

There also was evidence cited by forensic experts who examined Ricky's skeleton and concluded that he had been beaten.

But that evidence could be attacked as ambiguous because Ricky's internal organs, skin, muscle and other tissue are missing.

Ferency's theory is that Lisa Holland abused Ricky for years and that her husband helped cover it up.

Despite the strength of the prosecution's case, however, any motive for the alleged abuse is unclear.

If the judge approves it, Ferency plans to call a child abuse specialist from the University of Michigan who is expected to testify that Lisa Holland either exaggerated or fabricated Ricky's behavioral problems, possibly so she could keep him sedated and wouldn't have to watch him closely or to collect a larger stipend from the state, which subsidizes the care of adopted children with emotional or medical problems.

Contact **JACK KRESNAK** at 313-223-4544 or [jkresnak@freepress.com](mailto:jkresnak@freepress.com).

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WZZM13 ONLINE - ABC TELEVISION for ALL OF WEST MICHIGAN

## Lisa Holland trial expected to start today

Created: 9/17/2006 6:21:00 PM  
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 [Click here to play video](#)

Jury members will hear opening statements Monday in the case against Lisa Holland.

The Ingham County woman faces murder and child abuse charges in the death of her adopted son, Ricky Holland.

The seven year old boy's body was found in a wooded area in Ingham County back in January.

Both Lisa and Tim Holland were implicated in the boy's murder.



It took four days for the defense and prosecution to pick the jury. The defense also filed a motion for a change of trial venue, but the judge denied it.

Tim Holland will testify against his wife. He pleaded guilty to second degree murder last week in connection to Ricky's death.

Web Editor: [Joshua Aldredge](#), Producer



Lisa Holland

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# Lisa Holland's trial scheduled to begin

Updated: Sep 18, 2006 08:10 AM EDT

LANSING -- Opening statements are scheduled for Monday morning in the murder trial of Lisa Holland. She's the Lansing-area woman accused of killing her 7-year-old son Ricky.

Ricky Holland was last seen more than a year ago. At first, his parents said he ran away, which led to a huge search for him. In January, Ricky's body was found.

Last week, a jury was seated in the case. Both prosecutors and the defense said they are happy with the selections.

Several weeks ago, Lisa's husband Tim Holland pleaded guilty to second degree murder for his role in Ricky's death. Tim says Lisa killed the boy after years of abuse, and he helped cover up the death. As part of his plea deal, Tim Holland agreed to testify against his wife.



Lisa Holland



Tim Holland



Ricky Holland



## Muskegon Chronicle

### Trial of father delayed

Saturday, September 16, 2006

**By Rodney Hart**

#### **SPECIAL TO THE CHRONICLE**

The trial of a former Muskegon man accused of the drug-induced homicide of his 10-year-old son likely will not take place until December.

Martin Laskowski, 48, is accused of killing his son, Scott, by making him drink a soda laced with prescription Oxycodone, Adderal and sleeping pills.

Authorities discovered Scott Laskowski dead inside his home Nov. 19, 2004.

Martin Laskowski was found with a knife sticking out of his stomach and wounds to his wrists, authorities said.

Laskowski has filed a motion to suppress statements he made to authorities the day he was found, as well as other statements made in hospitals and jail. During a hearing Tuesday in Carthage, a videotape was played for Judge Richard Gambrell, and Laskowski was shown inside the Hancock County Jail admitting to officers he and his son planned a joint suicide.

Laskowski admitted he made the lethal cocktail for his son, but said the suicide was his son's idea and that Scott wanted to die.

His murder trial was supposed to start in Carthage Oct. 16, but four days have been reserved to finish the motion to suppress hearing.

The motion hearing will resume Oct. 12. Also reserved are Oct. 24, Oct. 26 and Oct. 31.

Hancock County State's Attorney Jim Drozd says he still has several witnesses to present at the motion hearing. Laskowski's attorney, Sam Naylor, has filed motions challenging previous denials of other motions to suppress evidence.

Laskowski has a pretrial hearing scheduled Nov. 6, and the case likely will be set for the week of Dec. 4, Drozd said.

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## Iowa man held in AG sex sting

GENESEE TOWNSHIP

THE FLINT JOURNAL FIRST EDITION

Saturday, September 16, 2006

By Bryn Mickle

[bmickle@flintjournal.com](mailto:bmickle@flintjournal.com) • 810.766.6383

GENESEE TWP. - A convicted

sex offender from Iowa is in trouble

with the law again after he allegedly

rode his bicycle to meet someone

he thought was a 14-year-old girl he

met on the Internet. The "girl" turned

out to be undercover

agent with the state

Attorney General's

office.

Melvin W. Dieckmann,

40, was living

with his girlfriend in

Genesee Township

when officials said

he began chatting

online Tuesday with the agent.

Dieckmann allegedly used graphic

sexual conversation, then asked

the girl to meet him Thursday at a

market on Richfield Road.

When Dieckmann showed up on his bicycle, police arrested him on charges of using the Internet to commit child sexually abusive activity.

He is in the Genesee County Jail and is expected to be arraigned today.

This is not the first time Dieckmann has been arrested on child sex charges.

He spent five years in prison in Iowa after being convicted of committing two lascivious acts with a child. Despite the conviction, he does not appear on public sex offender registries in Iowa or Michigan.

Dieckmann, who is unemployed, has been living in Michigan less than a year.

"Dieckmann chose the wrong place to relocate," said state Attorney General Mike Cox in a statement.

A spokesman for Cox said it was unclear if Dieckmann is required to register as a sex offender here because his conviction was 15 years ago. Dieckmann is the 105th person arrested since the Attorney General's child and public protection unit was restructured three years ago.



## Training slated for Baraga volunteers, officials

By MIKE FORNES

Tribune Staff Writer

CHEBOYGAN - Training required by the Diocese of Gaylord will be conducted from 6 p.m. until 8 p.m. Tuesday for volunteers or personnel who regularly work with youths at Bishop Baraga School.

“This is a two-hour commitment that must be made by anyone who will be working directly with our students,” said Baraga Principal Susan Nash. “If (anyone cannot) attend on this date, they will have to travel to Gaylord or another location in order to comply with the guidelines set forth by the Diocese.”

The free “Safe Environment” program was instituted in 2002 when the United States Catholic Bishops committed themselves to the Charter for the Protection of Children. Article 12 of the Charter calls for dioceses to provide education and training about ways to make and maintain a safe environment for children and young people according to Diocesan Representative Candice Neff, who conducts many of the training sessions.

The sessions have been conducted periodically since 2003.

The Diocese of Gaylord requires a criminal background check of all employees as well as volunteers regularly working with minors.

“All adults who work with minors including catechists, youth ministers and volunteers are also asked to attend one of the ‘Safe Environment’ programs,” Neff said. “Participation is also required for certification in many of the study tracts of the Diocese's Center for Catholic Studies.”

Neff said the sessions include a background on the Charter for the Protection of Children, a discussion of Diocesan policies, information regarding child abuse and neglect, and the importance of reporting suspicions of abuse and neglect to proper authorities.

“The Diocese continues to be blessed with local agencies and law enforcement who have worked with us to develop and provide training,” Neff added.

More information on the program may be obtained by calling the school at 627-5608.

Nash also announced that parent orientation for Baraga students will be conducted at 6:30 p.m. today in the gymnasium.

## **Don't keep silent about child abuse**

Continuing reports of the abuse suffered by little Ricky Holland of Ingham County make me sick ("Dad pleads guilty to murder," Sept. 6).

Where were his advocates?

His mother brought him to school on a leash, and wanted officials to punish him for disobedience at home by withholding treats that the other children enjoyed. Witnesses testified observing evidences of abuse, including malnourishment. If they remained silent and did not actively and persistently intervene, they deserve to be prosecuted!

Where were the friends of the family?

According to testimony, Ricky's father let his wife brutally mistreat the boy because he thought his love for her would change her abusive behavior. At Ricky's expense?

How callous can you get? Both parents, as part of their prison terms, should spend 10 hours each day in an oncology ward at a hospital. They would observe how dearly most parents love their little ones. How Ricky suffered, all alone! I am so sorry.

□ LAURIE DETERS/Byron Cente

## LOCAL COMMENT: Tell the full story of Oakland kids 'at risk'

BY MARIANNE UDOW

September 18, 2006

Child protection is a top priority at the Michigan Department of Human Services. We have been fundamentally reforming the child welfare system in Michigan for the past three years. In that time, we have expanded criminal background checks, engaged the State Police in training caseworkers, increased prevention funding, streamlined our computerized case management system, rolled out the "Family to Family" approach to child welfare in 63 counties, added 51 child protection workers, and accelerated other planned reforms. As a result, there are fewer children in foster care, fewer re-entering foster care, and an increased percentage of placements in the homes of relatives.



Marianne Udow

Likewise, an aggressive strategy to improve DHS performance in Oakland County has been in place for over a year. As part of that strategy, the 1,341 children incorrectly characterized in recent media coverage as "at-risk" have been visited and their cases have been investigated. All that remains in each of those cases is the final filing of paperwork. This fact is worth repeating: *Every one of these children was previously visited and none were considered at risk.*

Nonetheless, the paperwork backlog in Oakland County is unacceptable, and we have made significant personnel changes in response, including the reassignment of two senior child welfare staff members. DHS staff in Oakland County, including seven experienced child welfare professionals hired last month specifically for this effort, are working hard to clear the existing paperwork, and we expect the backlog will be gone within 60 days.

Child protective services positions have top priority for hiring -- in Oakland County and statewide. Positions are filled when they become vacant. The 25 new staff referenced in recent media coverage were hired over a period of nine months.

In the past year, leadership in the Oakland County DHS office has:

- Added 21 child welfare positions beyond those allocated in 2005.
- Strengthened communication by moving all child welfare staff to one location.
- Replaced management in key areas.
- Built a new data tracking system.
- Added new training with the prosecutor and the courts.

- Established a private call-in line for judges and the prosecutor to register any concerns.
- Added a court liaison position.

Additional enhancements will occur in the near future, including:

- Hiring a legal liaison to coordinate work with the prosecutor.
- Securing additional attorney general support so DHS case workers can increase their focus on children and families.
- Adding additional experienced child welfare leadership.

Longstanding challenges in Oakland County are well documented in the press and acknowledged by the department, the prosecutor and the courts. All have committed to improving these relationships.

Earlier this summer, Oakland County DHS, along with the courts and the prosecutor, gathered to kick off implementation of the Family to Family approach to child welfare. This event was the most encouraging sign yet, demonstrating our collective belief that stronger collaborations will benefit families, communities and, most important, children in Oakland County.

**MARIANNE UDOW** is director of the Michigan Department of Human Services. Write to her in care of the Free Press Editorial Page, 600 W. Fort St., Detroit 48226 or [oped@freepress.com](mailto:oped@freepress.com).

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This is a printer friendly version of an article from **The Detroit News**  
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September 18, 2006

**Editorial Rebuttal****Oakland County doesn't follow foster care law**

Oakland County Commissioner Chuck Moss' August 31 op-ed ("State should stop stiffing foster parents of care aid") about the county's problem paying foster care providers was one-sided and misleading. Moss knows the state and the county are in the middle of discussions to resolve this problem, and his inflammatory opinion does nothing to further the best interests of abused and neglected youths in Oakland County.

Moss should check with the county's legal counsel before spouting off about foster care payment responsibilities. When a case involving a temporary court ward does not qualify for federal funding, state law requires the county to pay providers and the state to reimburse the county for 50 percent of the cost. Until the law is changed, Oakland County needs to follow it, as the state and the other 82 counties do.

Oakland County is refusing to pay bills for services provided to abused and neglected youths -- not because those services weren't needed, but because the bills were submitted outside an arbitrary time limit set by the county. Apparently, Oakland County does not require the same 60-day standard from its other contractors. Contracts on the county's own Web site say contractors must bill "within 12 months."

Running for higher office can be noble, but building a campaign strategy on the backs of poor and abused kids is not. If Moss is successful in his bid for the state Legislature, he can direct his efforts at changing the law. Till then, he should direct his efforts at helping Oakland County comply with it.

*Laura J. Champagne*

*Chief Deputy Director*

*Michigan Department of Human Services*

*Lansing*

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## Flint flood

Foster care system struggles to serve flow of city kids

### GENESEE COUNTY

#### THE FLINT JOURNAL FIRST EDITION

Sunday, September 17, 2006

By Ron Fonger

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GENESEE COUNTY - The sheer number of children being removed from Flint homes in abuse and neglect cases has the county's foster care system out of balance and looking for solutions.

More than three out of four children taken from their homes across the county during the past five years lived within ZIP codes dominated by Flint neighborhoods - even though those areas make up just 39 percent of the county's population, according to a Flint Journal analysis of state and federal records.

There were more child removals per capita in five Flint-dominated ZIP codes than anywhere else in the county.

So many children are taken from some city neighborhoods, particularly in north and west Flint, that nearby foster homes are swamped - and children are ending up farther and farther from neighborhood schools, friends and family.

Experts say it's the kind of problem that sours kids on the system, increasing the chances they will end up as runaways and making it less likely they will be returned to their families.

One former foster care runaway from Genesee County told The Journal earlier this year that she ran away rather than be placed in a foster home in the Lansing area.

"We don't have enough homes in some areas. We absolutely do not," said Sheryl Thompson, county Department of Human Services director. Even though there are more licensed homes in Flint-area ZIP codes - 81 - than in the rest of the county combined, it's still not enough.

Thompson said managing the heavy Flint caseload doesn't prevent the department's Child Protective Services caseworkers from following up on complaints in other parts of the county, but those caseworkers are handling an average of 30 cases each - twice as many as is considered ideal.

And burdened DHS investigators won't guarantee a home visit unless they receive at least three calls over a one-year period about family trouble.

Meanwhile, the state plans a major recruiting effort for Flint foster homes as part of its Family to Family program before the end of this year.

Black and white

Thompson inherited a county DHS office earlier this year that is burdened by the same patterns as others in Michigan, with poor and black children much more likely to be taken from their parents than those who are white or wealthier.

#### QUICK TAKE

Where parents lose their children

Here are the ZIP codes where children are most often taken away from their parents in Genesee County:

Median

household

ZIP code Removals  
Area Population  
Racial makeup  
income

48505 852 Flints  
north side, 34,607  
More than 84% black  
\$22,146

slivers of Mt. Morris

and Genesee  
townships

48504 611 Flints  
west side, southern  
39,186 More than  
66% black \$30,835

Mt. Morris Township,  
small

corner of Flint  
Township

48506 491 Flints east  
side, southeast  
33,504 More than

For example, ZIP codes that take in northern Flint (48505) and the Fenton area (48430) have roughly the same number of people, according to the 2000 census. But household income is almost three times more in Fenton than in northern Flint.

Blacks make up less than 1 percent of the population in the Fenton ZIP code and more than 84 percent of people in the Flint ZIP code.

And while 27 children were removed from the Fenton-area homes in the past five years, 852 were taken from the northern Flint zone - about 30 times as many.

Parents are no worse in the Flint area than in the suburbs; they're just more burdened, said Frances Gilcreast, president of the Flint branch of the NAACP.

Gilcreast said racism also plays a part in the high number of urban child removals, along with poverty, drug abuse and the high number of young and single parents.

Many black parents lose their children because they are more likely to be poor, in court and because blacks and whites "have a different standard (of) what child abuse means to them.

"We raise them not sparing the rod," she said of black parents using corporal punishment, such as spanking. "We don't put timeouts in, because culturally we feel timeouts are not as effective."

Michigan's Child Protection law allows corporal punishment, provided it doesn't result in injuries including disfigurement.

Gilcreast agreed with DHS Director Marianne Udow that poverty is the strongest risk factor for losing a child to foster care.

It's also a lens through which others - including teachers and state caseworkers - view things.

"(We tend to) react differently to the same behavior if (we) see it in a community in poverty" instead of a middle-class family, Udow said.

And not only are poor parents who receive state assistance in closer and more frequent contact with government agencies, but their situation makes them more frustrated and likely to lash out at their children.

"Everything makes you angry when you can't hardly survive," Gilcreast said.

Foster mom's view

Margaret Robinson sees what leads to child removals when she looks out her window onto Page Avenue on Flint's north side, part of the 48505 area. More than one in three people here live in poverty.

"Look at all the vacant houses," said Robinson, who has been a foster parent in Flint for more than 30 years. "One, two, three. There's only three houses (with people) on this block.

"You have very few people working. This area - it's just pitiful."

Robinson is a rarity among foster parents because she's willing to take in hard-to-place teenage boys. In her ZIP code, her services are in constant demand.

Of all ZIP codes in the county that have more than 1,500 people, this area has the lowest household income, according to census data.

And when a family struggles to pay its bills, children are more likely to suffer the fallout: not having enough food, clothing, shelter or medical care.

Any of those things can cause social workers to petition a Family Court judge for a removal. Judges can also order an abuser or a neglectful adult out of a home or order help such as parenting classes.

96% white \$40,820

Genesee Township

48503 440  
Southwest corner of  
Flint 29,011 More  
than 48% white,  
\$29,455

more than 45% black

48507 280 Flint,  
southwest Flint  
Township, 33,099  
More than 82% white  
\$37,490

northeast corner of  
Mundy Township,

sliver of Grand Blanc  
Township

48458 182 Mt.  
Morris, parts of  
Vienna, 24,309 More  
than 74% white  
\$35,736

Mt. Morris, Thetford

and Genesee  
townships

48532 131 Northwest  
Flint Township,  
19,745 More than  
74% white \$40,348

small part of Clayton  
Townships

easternmost edge

48529 124  
Southwest Burton  
11,310 More than  
89% white \$35,311

Source: U.S. Census  
Bureau and Michigan  
Department of  
Human Services

"Seventy percent of children in foster care are there for neglect - not abuse - and neglect is often associated with poverty," Udow said. "It's one of our challenges, (because) helping people out of poverty is a difficult thing to get your arms around."

#### State's strategy

Udow is pushing Family to Family as the best way to lower foster care's troubling numbers. The program is based on the Baltimore-based Annie E. Casey Foundation's 1992 Family to Family initiative, which called for a stronger emphasis on programs like placing foster children within the neighborhoods where they live.

Already tried in several other counties and kicked off just this month in Shiawassee and Livingston counties, Family to Family is expected to be in place in Genesee County by the end of year. The program stresses finding ways to keep children at home if possible - particularly if poverty is the root cause of the neglect.

For example, rather than removing a child because there is no running water at home, the agency might instead find a way to get water service hooked up or restored.

Family to Family also focuses on getting more children out of institutional group homes, placing them with relatives if possible, and recruiting more foster parents in the areas where children are most often being taken from their homes.

Gilcreast said she supports efforts to keep children close to the areas they are being removed from - something that Flint foster parent Tonya Atkins, 29, also supports.

"It's good to keep them where it's familiar, because otherwise they lose everything," said Atkins, who has taken more than 40 children into her home in six years.

"If I could take more, I would take more because there is so much need," she said. "I don't think it's fair for them to be uprooted."

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## Foster care system facts

### GENESEE COUNTY

### THE FLINT JOURNAL FIRST EDITION

Sunday, September 17, 2006

### JOURNAL STAFF WRITER

#### Defining the terms

The number of children in families where child abuse and neglect was confirmed has more than doubled in Genesee County since 1996, according to Priority Children. Here's how state law defines abuse and neglect:

- **ABUSE:** Child abuse is harm or threatened harm to a child's health or welfare that occurs through nonaccidental physical or mental injury, sexual abuse, sexual exploitation or maltreatment.
- **NEGLECT:** Child neglect is harm or threatened harm to a child's health or welfare that occurs through negligence, including failure to provide adequate food, clothing, shelter or medical care by someone who has a legal responsibility for the child's health and well-being.

#### Family to Family at a glance

- The program focuses on placing each child in foster care with one permanent and stable family member in the child's own community, with the goal of keeping the child in the same home until reunification with a parent or adoption.
- The program includes recruitment of additional foster families in locations where they're needed. The goal is to increase the number of children who are placed in homes in their own neighborhood, to keep children close to friends, family and school.
- The concept was developed by the Baltimore-based Annie E. Casey Foundation in response to an increasing number of children in the child welfare system and a drop in the number of foster families.

#### How to become a foster parent

- Contact the Genesee County Department of Human Services or a private child-placing agency in the area. DHS can be reached at (810) 760-2217.
- You will be required to attend training, submit medical statements for your family, be interviewed in your home, have a criminal background check and provide letters of recommendation. The process takes three to six months, and you must have a defined source of income to meet the needs of the foster family.
- No more than four foster children can be placed in a home at one time.
- Foster parents are paid twice monthly. The amount depends on the age and needs of the child or children they're caring for. They also receive a semi-annual clothing allowance and other support.

#### How we did it

- The Flint Journal's review of home removals and foster care used state and federal data, part of which was requested under the Freedom of Information Act. The Journal compared the numbers of children removed from homes and the total population within every ZIP code in Genesee County from 2001-05.

## Helping keep kids on right path

### Wayne Co. youths at risk get mentors

**BY JACK KRESNAK**

FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER

*September 16, 2006*

As a teen mom, 14-year-old Gjermella Williams faces 18 years or more of challenges as her 6-week-old daughter grows up.

But, thanks to a new joint program of the Wayne County Department of Children and Family Services and the Michigan State University Extension, Gjermella can turn to another adult.

Her mentor, Kimberly Ramsey, 46, of Southfield, joins Gjermella's mother, Rachel Taylor of Detroit, as a second mature voice to encourage her when she's down and celebrate her successes.

"She talks to me about keeping my grades up, and she talks to me about college," Gjermella, a Detroit eighth-grader, said of Ramsey.

Gjermella is one of about 100 kids who are part of a new Wayne County 4-H Mentoring Program who will enjoy a day of fun today at the Michigan State Fairgrounds.

The kids involved in the Wayne County/MSU Extension Service partnership are 10 to 17 years old and at risk of dropping out of school or becoming delinquents.

"I tell her that no matter what circumstances she's gone through, she can overcome that." Ramsey said.

Contact **JACK KRESNAK** at 313-223-4544 or [jkresnak@freepress.com](mailto:jkresnak@freepress.com).

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#### **Become a mentor**

Call the Michigan State University Extension office at 313-833-3412.

Wayne County children 10 to 17 years old are eligible for the program. Mentors do not have to live in the county. Volunteers will undergo a criminal background check and must commit to spending a year mentoring a child at least twice a week for at least four hours a week.

Other mentoring opportunities:

[www.mentormichigan.org](http://www.mentormichigan.org) .

• [www.mentoring.org](http://www.mentoring.org) .

• [www.helpusa.org](http://www.helpusa.org) .



This is a printer friendly version of an article from **Lansing State Journal**. To print this article open the file menu and choose Print.

Published September 18, 2006

## Driving home the message: Youth ChalleNGe sergeants bring out best in at-risk teens

By Susan Vela  
Lansing State Journal

BATTLE CREEK - Insults. Screams. Intimidation. Whatever it takes.

Ready to pounce on every misstep, the drill sergeants at the Michigan Youth ChalleNGe Academy seem menacing for most of the day.

They demand physical training at 5:40 a.m., precise formations between academic and vocational classes, and lights out at 9:30 p.m.



(Photo by Becky Shink/Lansing State Journal)  
Standing at attention: Cadets (from left) Matt Stone, 18, of Grosse Pointe, Simon Fogg, 16, of Bellevue, and John Andreas, 17, of Muskegon respond to their instructor before eating lunch Thursday. The cadets have seven minutes to eat.

### Part four of a continuing series

About this Project: The Lansing State Journal is spending time with Michigan Youth ChalleNGe Academy's 15th class to learn how they failed in traditional schools and why they're opting for a military academy that tests them academically, physically, mentally and emotionally.

"Boy, you better get somewhere. Don't run! Just go quickly," Staff Sgt. John Palacios ordered Travis Anderson, as the 16-year-old Holly teen returned to class.

Since the academy's 15th class started in July, 55 teens have bailed out of the program, preferring life as high school dropouts over another moment with about 20 drill sergeants, who prefer the title "cadre."

Many of the 96 still willing to brave the cadre's wrath are discovering new characteristics in themselves: Trust. Respect. Understanding.

And those qualities are amplifying their views of themselves and rippling through the other relationships they hold most dear.

### New ground

At first, "I thought they loved to scream. (But) they had to do it," said DeWitt teen Michael Parish, acknowledging that he and other civilian youths weren't totally prepared for the cadre.

Now, the 17-year-old's opinion of a drill sergeant who once seemed sadistic, Sgt. 1st Class Matthew Send, is pivoting as neatly as the cadet's marches across the academy's serene campus.

"He's always tried to help us as much as he can. He'll help you and take the time to make sure you understand things," said Michael, with his rifle slung across his shoulder Wednesday.

Send recently selected Michael for the academy's Color Guard.

Cadre members say there's a reason for their stern visage.

They want to strip the kids of their pretensions and guards, let them know who's in control, and then instill confidence so that they can become productive members of society.

"There's no better day than graduation day," insisted Send, who looks forward to the hugs and handshakes he'll inevitably receive from teens he once made glower.

For about \$35,000 a year, the cadre members play the role of parents, friends, coaches and counselors.

However, "you have to be able to judge which hat to put on," Staff Sgt. Leslie Carpenter said.

### **Hard knocks**

There are three months to go.

Meanwhile, Ashley Williams, 16, of Niles has lost about 20 pounds because of the academy's physical training, and she's improved at accomplishing the drill sergeants' commands.

She gives a lot of credit to Staff Sgt. Brian Czerniak. When she's in the parking lot, gravel grinding into her palms during pushups, he's generally standing nearby, telling her she can do it.

"I've never seen so many people that really do care," said Ashley, who wants to become stronger so that she can study graphics communications and take care of a younger sister.

Raymond Lira's entire mood lifts when Staff Sgt. Anthony Smith arrives for his shift.

"I've got that extra motivation," Raymond said. "I can prove to him I can do better than what he thinks of me."

Which is pretty surprising, since Raymond was kicked out of Holt Senior High School last spring because of aggression toward a teacher.

Yet when he stepped back from Smith during the academy's first week, Smith just stepped forward and doled out more harsh words.

This doggedness also has impressed Brian Forney, 17, of Mason.

"They're trying to get us to work together and to get ready for real life," the teen observed.

He doesn't want another military-type experience after the academy. Still, he'd like to put some of the academy's best qualities, such as its emphasis on leadership and respect, into the culinary arts career he's training for.

The drill sergeants helped him realize that he'd like to treat his parents better, too. He doesn't want to break any more promises to them.

### **Not forgotten**

Wearing running shoes and Army sportswear, Palacios reported for his last day as a cadre member last week. He has plenty of stories to share after four years on the job.

"You're so hard on them, and you think that they hate you," he said. "At 10 weeks, they understand you were that way to get them to make a change."

On the night before graduation, the cadets will get a chance to parody the cadre.

Palacios won't be forgotten.

"He doesn't like to fool around much," said Travis, after Palacios yelled at him. The teen then gave the best Palacios imitation he could muster.

"You better get a move on, boy! Get to class!"

Contact Susan Vela at 702-4248 or [svela@lsj.com](mailto:svela@lsj.com).

### Writing home

Cadets write letters almost every night. Several say the correspondence is building stronger family relationships based on respect and trust. Here is a letter that 16-year-old Simon Fogg (photo, right), most recently of Bellevue, wrote to his adoptive mom in Wayland:

Dear Mom:

How is everything going? Everything over here is going just fine.

I wish I could be at home with you because right now it feels like I'm doing a bad job, because I feel like I'm getting talked (to) too much. Although I'm just about getting talked to never. Today, (1st Sgt. Lyle) Forcia talked to me. And, while he was talking to me, I just couldn't capture the fact that it was the first sergeant. Today, it has been hard because one of my best friends is a squad leader. And he is under a lot of stress. And he is in a bad mood. And it's hard to stay in a good mood while I'm around him.

I wish everybody could see through my past for once. And, if that doesn't change how they look at life, then there is something really wrong with that person. How important life is. Because if they went through what I did, ... in my opinion, people would have a totally new perspective on life.

Love, Simon Fogg

### New experiences

They're finding the niche they never discovered in traditional high schools.

Every single one of Michigan Youth ChalleNGe Academy's 96 at-risk teens is involved in activities outside the classroom, which range from athletics to a yearbook committee.

Sure, participation is mandatory, but roughly 30 percent also are on the academy's Student Council or have the prestigious honor of representing the academy around the state as members of the Drill Team or Color Guard.

Some locals have been chosen for these most selective groups. Raymond Lira, 16, of Lansing is on the Student Council. Both Ryan Gilliland, 16, of Eaton Rapids and Michael Parish, 17, of DeWitt are learning precision moves with rifles. Ryan is on the Drill Team; Michael, the academy's Color Guard.

The out-of-school activity is establishing a confidence in Michael that he never found at DeWitt High School because of its distractions. DeWitt High School also didn't have drill sergeants.

"Here you have to go to school every day," said the teen, who has greater than a 4.0 grade point average. He just learned that he was chosen for the Color Guard.

**Timeline**

- July 9: Day One of Pre-ChalleNGe, 146 of 155 accepted candidates initially reported for duty. Later, five standby candidates arrived.
- July 24: Academics officially start with 110 cadets.
- Last week: The academy's 10th week; 96 cadets remain.
- December: Graduation

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September 18, 2006

## Warren man fatally shot by police

They say he fired at them during domestic dispute call; family calls shooting unprovoked.

**Oralandar Brand-Williams / The Detroit News**

**WARREN** -- City police officers shot and killed an 18-year-old Sunday following a complaint of domestic violence at his home in the 13000 block of Martin.

Police said the victim, identified by relatives as Chong Xiong, had brandished a handgun at officers who were attempting to apprehend him about 9:45 a.m. on domestic complaint called in Saturday.

After police entered the home, Xiong fired at least once at the officers, who returned fire, fatally wounding him, according to a press release from the Warren Police Department.

But relatives said they don't believe Xiong shot at police.

"They just wanted police to put him in jail and cool him down -- not come in and shoot him," said Bee Pang, Xiong's cousin and an interpreter for parents Pang and Meelor Xiong. "We didn't imagine it would happen like this."

The Xiongs, speaking in their native Hmong, said they were surprised Sunday to hear a knock on the door since no one in the home had called police that day.

Meelor Xiong said 20 police officers rushed into their home and headed toward the basement, where Chong Xiong was sleeping.

Police had been called to the home Saturday after relatives said Xiong fired shots in the home after he became angry after his father failed to show up at home in time to let him borrow his truck. No one was injured in Saturday's incident, according to the police statement.

Police did not answer questions about Sunday's shooting, other than to refer to the press statement.

Police spent much of Sunday retrieving items such as a blood-stained mattress. Police also towed a silver Toyota Tundra truck from in front of the home.

Robert Vang, a cousin of Xiong's, stood outside the house in tears as police removed the yellow crime scene tape following the preliminary investigation.

"I'm surprised. The tragedy just happened," Vang said. "We never expected this."

He was among about 20 members of Xiong's family who had gathered at the scene.

Neighbors in the area, near Schoenherr and 11 Mile, said there had been previous problems at the home.

"I told someone one day it would just be a matter of time," said Gerald Zwolinsky, who lives across the street and saw police come to the home several times in the past year.

Zwolinsky said he was awakened by sounds of gunshots Sunday and looked out his window to see police ushering out a group of women from the yellow brick, ranch-style home.

Xiong's family said they plan to pursue a formal complaint against the police and possibly file a lawsuit.

Xiong was born in Chonburi, Thailand, and immigrated to the United States as an infant. He once attended Detroit Public Schools but it is uncertain whether he was enrolled in school or if he graduated.

An autopsy is expected to be performed today, said Dr. Daniel Spitz, Macomb County's chief medical examiner.

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# ClickOnDetroit.com

## Police: Teen Opens Fire, Officers Shoot Back

POSTED: 6:08 pm EDT September 17, 2006

UPDATED: 10:44 pm EDT September 17, 2006

A domestic violence call turns fatal for a local teen after shots were fired between the teen and police.

Police responded to the home on Martin Street in Warren on a domestic violence call. The teen was inside the home and armed, Police said.

The teen opened fire and officers shot back, killing the teenager, according to police reports.

The victim's family wandered the scene after the shooting and told police the teen had a history of violence.

Police are investigating.

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Published September 18, 2006

## Incoming leader set to rebuild Highfields

Youth offenders program addressing abuse issues

By Stacey Range  
Lansing State Journal

Highfields Inc. appears to be emerging from a year of scandal and struggle with a new leader taking the helm of the nonprofit agency.

After 15 years of state employment, John Evans of Williamston takes over Oct. 1 as chief executive officer and president of the Onondaga-based family and children's services agency.

"I'm so excited," Evans said. "It's going to be a lot of hard work, a real challenge. But Highfields does so much good for the communities, and the people there have done their best to turn it around."

Scathing reports of staff physically abusing boys in Highfields' residential program for juvenile offenders caused Ingham County judges to pull 33 youths from the center in February.

Among the substantiated charges were that a Highfields worker shoved a boy's face into the snow after the 15-year-old refused to shovel a sidewalk; another counselor allowed some boys to haze a newcomer by pelting him with shaving cream cans, spoiled milk, shampoo and other personal care products; and two other counselors marched an angry boy around outside in the cold without a coat or shoes.

The board of directors responded with a series of actions, including removal of the president and CEO, firing some staff and devising new training programs for workers.

Evans sat down with the Lansing State Journal to discuss the problems and where he intends to take Highfields.

• Why do you want this job?

• I've been involved with Highfields on the fringes for years and years. As a probation officer for both of the counties (Ingham and Lenawee), I had kids out at the campus. Later on when I was working for DHS (Michigan Department of Human Services) we had contracts there, so I had children in foster care and protective services there. And now that I'm in administration, I administer

### The John Evans file

- Age: 53
- Hometown: Williamston
- Career: State division director and other various roles at the Michigan Department of Human Services; juvenile probation officer for Ingham County and Lenawee County; treatment specialist with Boysville of Michigan
- Education: Bachelor's degree in social science from Siena Heights College in Adrian; master's degree in criminal justice from Michigan State University
- Family: Wife, Cindy; daughter, Michelle Magee of Lansing; son, Scott Evans
- Other: Serves on the Williamston Community Schools Board of Education

those contracts and the Child Care Fund, which is the funding source for a lot of children's services. So I've been aware of Highfields for a long time and been a fan from afar for many, many years. This is my opportunity to contribute in a different way.

- What was your reaction when the troubles at Highfields surfaced last winter?

- I was surprised. Highfields ... has always been an excellent organization. So I was surprised to hear that, although this is a business where things like that can happen.

Then after being surprised, I was very impressed by how the board handled it. From what I can tell, they've addressed the issues as best they can. In fact, I would suspect that given all the things they've been through and all the corrections that have been made, they're probably stronger than ever right now.

- One of the problems that surfaced was the use of force in restraining some youth. What's your position on the use of force on juveniles at institutions such as Highfields?

- Only when it's absolutely necessary to keep everybody safe. Certainly in an institutional setting there will be times when people will have to be kept safe, when there's harm that could happen and then in that case it should be used only by trained staff. I do not support peer restraints.

I personally think that the way you avoid situations like that is with preventive measures such as training and practice.

- After 44 years of stellar reputation, Highfields took quite a blow this year. Now that it's reopened and rebuilding, how will you restore its reputation and the community's faith in the agency?

- As with any reputation, individual or agency, that will take some time and I understand that. First of all we want to make sure everybody is aware Highfields continued to serve children and families in the community services without missing a beat. From what I understand 300 kids and families a day.

Another indication is the positive steps taken by the board of directors to make sure that even though there were problems and we did take a public relations hit, they took all of the appropriate actions. They voluntarily gave their license back while they made their fixes, they brought in an interim director, and a new residential manager and they only brought back the staff that passed all the new screening criteria.

It's going to take time. There's not going to be one public press release that's going to win everybody back over, so we have to continue those strides they made and make sure the courts, DHS, communities and families know we took this seriously and corrections have been made and they will be maintained.

- Aside from restoring the reputation and maintaining corrections made, what other plans do you have for Highfields' future?

- I really hope we can grow the community-based alternative programs. They've put in place a short-term program where children can go and get the respite they need, and I'm very glad they have this program in place. There are very few programs like this in Michigan, and I hope to grow that at Highfields.

Beyond that, I think Highfields' light has been kept under a bushel a little bit. I want people to know what Highfields does and can do.

In the past six months, there's been a lot of focus on the residential program and the problems and corrections that have been made. But they have a long history of excellence, and it's my sincere hope we can bring it back and publicize it a little better and expand our services to Michigan's kids.

## Finding shelter

### Series of conferences aims to eliminate homelessness

By Bobby Ampezzan  
, The News-Herald

DEARBORN — Agencies serving the needs of the homeless in the area have a goal for the next 10 years: to eradicate the problem.

On Monday, about 75 people met to identify the various kinds of homelessness and to flesh out what agencies would need in place to end it.

This is the first in a series of conferences intended to draft a "Ten Year Plan to End Homelessness," an effort by the Michigan State Housing Development Authority that carries with it a \$10,000 grant for any county that participates.

All of Michigan's 83 counties have signed on.

The meeting at Park Place Catering began with a simply stated, but ultimately complex question about the effect of homelessness in the area: "Why should people (with homes) be concerned personally about homelessness in out-Wayne County?"

While Jane Scarlett, homeless programs director for the Wayne-Metropolitan Community Action Agency, said her answer is not the compassionate one "most bleeding heart liberals" want to hear — "it costs taxpayer dollars."

And not just directly, but homelessness shrinks the labor force, the consumer pool and keeps people away from businesses in areas with high rates of homelessness, Scarlett said.

According to MiSHDA, about 40,000 Michiganders live without shelter, and 18,000 of these are families with children.

Some who attended Monday's meeting said those numbers are soft, and that the homeless are a particularly troublesome demographic to track.

Many are newly homeless, some because they have just lost their

jobs and, subsequently, their homes, and some because they have just gotten out of prison (most of these are non-violent offenders, advocates said).

Some who are homeless are new adults, "dumped" out of the foster care system at 18, said Ruby Lewis, who has seen many such cases as homeless liaison for the Taylor School District.

"Some of these folks this winter will freeze," said Red Varner of the Southgate-based Downriver Community Conference, but still some area shelters require drug testing before they will take in an indigent.

While social workers agree on many points, they split on whether the biggest obstacle to beating homelessness is housing or employment.

Those who contend that earning a living wage is the primary means by which people can get back into homes said that many without shelter are recovering from substance abuse while others suffer mental illness — and both are populations at risk in local economies.

But a more troubling trend in this area is what some social workers called "people with jobs yesterday."

"I'm seeing more of middle America calling me because of (corporate) downsizing," said one case manager, Shirley McKee of Wayne-Metro CSA.

She recently acquired a client who was living Downriver in a tent on United States Steel Corp. property.

"It's horrible," she said. "... They're the calls I most dread, because the safety net is not going to keep you from calling."

The Rev. Gary Schippling, a minister at Blessed Hope in Lincoln Park, organizes Faith Fest every year.

"Is anyone going after business ... to 'incentivize' employment for families on the cusp?" he asked "We're not doing much of anything to handle this issue."

Jean Griggs, a housing advocacy coordinator for Neighborhood Legal Services of Michigan in southwest Detroit said not only is employment for the homeless rife with inadequacies, but certain incentives and aid also are "contradictory."

Many people trying to better themselves through education lose

their unemployment benefits when they register for classes, she said.

Most, however, said housing was the more immediate need, especially for people "on the cusp."

"Housing is the most important thing," said Jennifer Lepard, chairwoman of the Out-Wayne County Homeless Services Coalition, which organized Monday's meeting.

Many at the meeting rallied behind the Rev. Kathy Piascik of the Gift of Mercy World Ministries in Melvindale when she said agencies and advocates desperately need assistance creating shelters in cities that have resisted housing for the indigent or transient.

Cities "don't even want rental (properties)," Piascik said. "Shelters? Forget it!"

Denial is the predominant community attitude toward homelessness, many social workers said.

"It's a tough battle," said Fred Decaminada, owner of Faith Recovery Center in Lincoln Park, where on Aug. 23 one resident shot and killed another resident, and then turned the gun on himself.

Since that day, Decaminada said, the city has issued citations against the facility, claiming it is illegally zoned.

Decaminada, himself an addict who has been in recovery for 23 years, had been operating a Safe Haven shelter in River Rouge before that city closed it down.

"The security at Faith is better than it was when I bought it," Decaminada said.

The group of advocates Monday said part of any new 10-year plan must include the creation of state-revenue-sharing incentives to create shelters and enforce fair-share housing practices.

Along with policy strategies, the plan must include an effort to combat the complacency associated with homelessness, they said.

Families are the largest growing subsection of the homeless population.

"I'm surprised as a society we tolerate that anyone is on the street and hungry," said Mia Rye, communications director for Wayne-

Metro CSA.

Especially when it is more economical to put indigent people in housing than to leave them out on the streets," said Paulette Smith of the state's Office of Supportive Housing and Homeless Initiatives.

"On the street, they're more likely to end up in emergency rooms multiple times, or go through the jail system," Smith said, all of which is ultimately more expensive.

The next meeting in the 10-year plan draft process for out-Wayne County is scheduled for Oct. 3.

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# Council to unveil plan to end homelessness in the area

By Tanya Berkebile, Cadillac News

CADILLAC - Every day, there are approximately 88 people in the area that are homeless at any given point, according to the Wexford/Missaukee Homeless Prevention Coalition.

These are men, women and children who live in shelters, motel rooms, campgrounds and the woods or on the streets.

That number doesn't include those at risk of being homeless in the area.

"There are a few hundred in the area who are close to being homeless," said Shari Spoelman, community coordinator of the Human Services Leadership Council. "They live in dilapidated homes or places not meant for human habitation. They may be doubled up, have eviction notices or a shutoff notice for a utility."

To help stop this problem, the council is inviting the public to a community summit from 8 to 10 a.m. Wednesday at the United Methodist Church in Cadillac. The council will unveil a 10-year plan to end homelessness in the area and ask for input from community members.

"We, as a group, have been meeting since May and developed a draft plan," Spoelman said. "We are going to share the plan with those community stakeholders who attend the summit. We will ask them for input, to support the plan and for them to sign up if they can help in any way."

The main focus on the plan is prevention of homelessness. It is split in several different categories based on subgroups of the homeless. The groups include families with children, single, those with a mental illness or senior citizens.

"We are seeing a larger amount of seniors who are becoming homeless," Spoelman said. "Last year was an awful year trying to make ends meet for them, with high energy costs."

Anyone is welcome to attend the summit, especially community leaders and stakeholders; those who have been homeless or at risk of being homeless; service providers; and anyone interested.

Breakfast will be served so people are asked to RSVP by calling (231) 876-3280.

[tberkebile@cadillacnews.com](mailto:tberkebile@cadillacnews.com) | 775-NEWS (6397)

## Your Local Connection

**What:** The Human Services Leadership Council is inviting the community to take part in a 10-year plan to end homelessness in the area

**Why:** According to the Wexford/Missaukee Homeless Prevention Coalition, there are approximately 88 people in the area that are homeless and hundreds of households more who are at risk.

When: The meeting is from 8 to 10 a.m. Wednesday at the Cadillac Methodist Church in Cadillac. Because there is a breakfast, people are asked to RSVP by calling (231) 876-3280



## **Adoption Bills Fuel Write-In Campaign**

**MIRS, Friday, September 15, 2006**

Groups opposing legislation that would allow adoption agencies to turn away prospective parents who don't fit the agency's mission statement have launched a write-in campaign to stop the legislation from passing the Senate on the basis that it's could open the door for open prejudices against minorities and gays.

The groups argue that [HB 5908](#) and [HB 5909](#) would allow the agencies to discriminate against certain adoptive parents because the bills allow agencies to make placements with families that fit their mission statement rather than the family's competency in raising children.

The Triangle Foundation has urged its 27,000-member to flood Senate offices with letters, e-mails and phone calls asking that the bills be stopped. The group tried this tactic unsuccessfully earlier with the House, which passed the bills last week 69-37 with little fanfare.

"This is a radical departure from current adoption policy," said Sean **KOSOFSKY** with the Triangle Foundation. "Right now it's what's in the best interest of the child. This is what every discriminative adoption worker wants."

The Department of Human Services (DHS) is opposed to the bills because it said the bills discriminate against certain groups of people and violate the Elliot Larson Act and other civil rights acts.

Furthermore, if [HB 5909](#) passes, the DHS would be required to continue providing grants to agencies that the DHS might find discriminatory. About 60 percent of the agencies that the Department of Human Services (DHS) uses to facilitate adoptions are private.

"This is one of those solutions in search of a problem," Kosofsky said. "Not one adoption agency has claimed that they've had to adopt to someone they didn't want to adopt to."

The state Catholic Conference has been in favor of the bills since their inception. When the bills passed the House, Paul **LONG** with the Catholic Conference made the following statement.

"As a matter of religious freedom, faith-based agencies can and should be able to provide child placement services within the precepts of their faith tradition without obstruction from state government," Long said.

"This legislation simply asks the state of Michigan to respect the constitutional guarantee of religious freedom and allow the Catholic Church and other faith-based child placement agencies to operate within the tenets of their religious tradition. Michigan Catholic Conference applauds the House of Representatives for passing these important bills and calls on the Senate and the Administration to finish the job."

Though Kosofsky was displeased that the bills made it past the House, he's hopeful that they'll stall in the Senate and if they don't, he's banking on Gov. Jennifer [GRANHOLM](#) vetoing the measure.

"We can continue working on the Senate. I hope it doesn't get any traction in the Senate," Kosofsky said. "From what we understand, this bill is not a priority in the Senate."

Granholt Spokeswoman Liz [BOYD](#) said the Governor is opposed to both bills because they will prevent some families who are in the adoption pool, from adopting kids out of foster care.

Kelly **BARTLETT**, chief of staff for Sen. Bill [HARDIMAN](#), who is chair of the committee that has the bills, said the Senator stand firm in his belief that the state shouldn't ask religious organizations to change their identity, but he also doesn't foresee the Senator jamming the bills through.

"There really is no doubt about how the Senator feels about working with faith-based organizations," Bartlett said. "He wants them to be able to provide service, but he doesn't want them to lose who they are in the process."

The Senator said he wants to make sure the bills do not violate any civil rights acts before moving them forward, Bartlett said. Bartlett doesn't anticipate the bills being taken up before the election.

Dave **MALUCHNIK** urged Granholm and Hardiman not to let scare tactics sway them on the issue.

"We would encourage the Senate and the administration not to give validity to scare tactics, and work to uphold the constitutional right of religious freedom for faith-based child placement agencies," he said. "There's nothing in the legislation that affects state operated child placement agencies."

## **Udow To Speak On Racial Disparity**

MIRS, Friday, September 15, 2006

The Department of Human Services (DHS) Marianne **UDOW** will speak about the overrepresentation of children and families of color in child welfare programs at the Casey Family Breakthrough Series Collaborative 's third and final learning session in Detroit, Sept. 19-20. She has served as executive sponsor since the start of the series in September 2005.

Michigan was selected from 13 states and jurisdictions because of its efforts to address racial disparity in child welfare programs. In every state, African American and Native American children have historically made up a disproportionate percentage of the child welfare population when compared to their percentage of the general population.



## Unused cancer drugs funneled to needy

Saturday, September 16, 2006

By Kyla King

The Grand Rapids Press

Michigan residents who can not afford expensive cancer drugs soon could get the medications for free.

Legislation expected to be signed into law by Gov. Jennifer Granholm would create a state-run program allowing families to donate unused cancer drugs to those who can not afford them.

"There's a huge need, and there's a huge waste," said Rep. Barb VanderVeen, R-Allendale, who sponsored the bill. "There's millions of dollars of medication that, for the most part, is flushed or thrown out, which also is not good for our environment."

And the program is sorely needed for low-income patients who forego expensive cancer treatments, said Judy Stewart, government relations manager for the Great Lakes Division of the American Cancer Society.

"We do have medicine we destroy after a patient has died because we just can not take the risk, and it's illegal to pass medicine along," said Tracy Lark, spokeswoman for Hospice of Michigan. "Patients often say give this to somebody else to use but obviously we don't do that, we destroy the medicine."

The cancer drug repository program would be similar to laws in 14 other states by allowing anyone 18 or older to donate legally obtained cancer drugs or supplies to designated repositories, such as local pharmacies or health care centers, VanderVeen said.

Pharmacists then would inspect the medications to make sure they have not been tampered with. The drugs would be reissued to uninsured patients or those on Medicaid, who prove they have a cancer diagnosis or prescription.

Details still need to be worked out by the Community Health Department, which likely would administer the program, VanderVeen said.

"We're all kind of in the learning stage right now," she said.

She expects a toll-free telephone number and Web site will be available for people and doctors to get information.

VanderVeen said she introduced the legislation after watching her second daughter, now in remission, spend three months in the hospital getting treatment for leukemia.

"We were on the cancer floor, and you see the ravages of cancer at a very personal level," VanderVeen said.

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Published September 17, 2006

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## County child support checks go electronic

By KURT MADDEN  
Editor

EATON COUNTY — Thousands of recipients of child support payments through the county's Friend of the Court soon won't hear the alibi: "The check is in the mail."

Beginning this month, support payments will be directly deposited electronically into personal checking, savings accounts or debit card accounts, said Allen Schlossberg, Eaton County's Friend of the Court.

In Eaton County alone, some 12,500 cases are monitored by the Friend of the Court. State officials estimate only about a third of all child support recipients had been receiving their money electronically before new disbursement method began.

The new payment system was rolled out under a new state law in November of 2005 in four "pilot" counties, and has since been expanded to 70 more counties.

Eaton, Clinton and Ingham counties, according to the state's plan, were scheduled to begin using the system for the first time this month.

"We have been told that it is working very well. It is a blessing for everybody, and it should spell the end to the checks floating through the mail somewhere. You won't hear, 'The check is in the mail.' anymore because they won't be in the mail," he said.

According to the state office of child support, three notices are sent to client, asking them to request direct deposit or a debit card.

State officials say all recipients will be required to choose either direct payment to a personal bank account or a VISA-branded debit card.

Paper child support checks will no longer be mailed to customers, unless they meet hardship exceptions specified in state law.

Exemptions to electronic disbursement may be granted if there is a hardships caused by physical or mental disability, literacy or language.

Also, two or less payments per year, or individuals with home and work addresses more than 30 miles from an automatic teller machine or financial institution may also be exempted.

Schlossberg said, "With paper checks, there is a risk of stolen or misdirected checks. Additionally,

with electronic disbursement, the funds are immediately deposited to the payer's account. The payer will be able to avoid going to the bank to cash a paper check." If a person doesn't receive a support payment, the cause of the problem will be far easier to discern, Schlossberg said.

If a person decides to use a debit card, support payments are deposited directly to the card through the state's disbursement system.

There is no fee to use the card, and it may be used at all locations that accept Visa debit cards for point of sale transactions. But those who choose to use an ATM to access their debit card funds are subject to a fee. Customers may also obtain cash with a purchase from Interlink merchants with a fee, state officials say.

For additional information on electronic disbursement, go to the child support section of the department of human services Web site, [www.michigan.gov/dhs](http://www.michigan.gov/dhs) or [www.misdu.com](http://www.misdu.com).

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Editorial

The Oakland Press

September 17, 2006

## **Child custody bill deserves close look**

Fathers and lawyer coalitions have claimed for years that, when it comes to child custody, Michigan courts have overwhelmingly favored mothers - sometimes to the point of excluding fathers from their children's lives.

Even in joint custody agreements, fathers' rights groups often claim dads get less time and vengeful ex-wives can manipulate courts to minimize the time fathers spend with their children.

A bill introduced in the Michigan House in 2005 seeks to change that by mandating that judges, whenever possible, order joint custody with equal time for both parents.

House bill 5267, which has been languishing in the House Committee on Family and Children Services for nearly a year, stipulates that, in a custody dispute, courts should order joint custody unless a judge determines "by clear and convincing evidence" that a parent is unfit, unwilling or unable to care for a child. Another exclusion is if a parent moves his or her residence outside the school district the child has attended during the previous year and the parent cannot maintain that school schedule without interruption.

If a parent cannot maintain the school schedule, the judge must order both parents to mediation to determine a custody arrangement that maximizes both parents' abilities to "participate equally in a relationship with their child" while accommodating the school schedule.

There is a bond between a mother and child with which we should be wary of tampering. Still, the current custody mechanisms sometimes can be too punitive to the father without an offsetting benefit to the child.

Whether this bill offers a better alternative is unclear, but it deserves a public hearing.

Michigan Report

September 15, 2006

## **WELFARE CASELOADS CONTINUE CLIMB**

Families receiving cash assistance from the state increased for the fourth consecutive month in August, while the number of families who received Food Assistance Program aid rose for the eleventh consecutive month, according to reports from the Department of Human Services.

The Family Independence Program had 58,157 cases in August, up from 82,335 cases in July, 80,280 cases in June and 79,133 cases in May. The cases represented 230,681 people, up from 226,863 people in July.

In August there were 531,185 households receiving Food Assistance Program benefits, up from 526,209 households in July and 523,055 families in June.

Childcare cases also began to climb again in August, to 63,335 cases representing 121,740 children. The cases had decreased in July to 61,090, representing 116,569 children, from 62,969 cases in June.

The number of people required to work reporting income also climbed again to 32 percent after having dropped in July to 31 percent. That percentage previously had held steady since April. The percent of cases exceeding the federal 60-month limit increased in August to 13.5 percent. That rate has hovered near 13 percent since October.





## Hospitals collecting food for the needy

HOMETOWN HEADLINES

**GRAND BLANC TOWNSHIP**

**THE FLINT JOURNAL FIRST EDITION**

Saturday, September 16, 2006

**By Shantell M. Kirkendoll**

**JOURNAL STAFF WRITER**

Hospitals are expected to announce the kickoff of their annual Michigan Harvest Gathering Monday at Genesys Regional Medical Center, a collaboration to collect food for the hungry.

Genesys, Hurley Medical Center and McLaren Regional Medical Center participate to collect food for the Food Bank of Eastern Michigan. Other hospitals also will have collection points.

The Michigan Health and Hospital Association backs the state-wide campaign to collect food and money for thousands of hungry Michigan residents.

- Shantell M. Kirkendoll

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Kalamazoo Gazette

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Monday, September 18, 2006

## **Earned income credit gets people working**

The Michigan Legislature recently enacted a state Earned Income Tax Credit. The EITC was a Republican idea, first signed into law by President Ford in 1975 and expanded significantly by President Reagan in 1986. Reagan said it best when he called the EITC ``the best anti-poverty, the best pro-family, the best job-creation measure to come out of the Congress."

The EITC is a tax credit going only to households with earnings, with the size of the credit rising as earnings increase. More than 635,000 households in Michigan that receive the federal credit will be eligible. Many of these are homes with children and most have annual incomes of less than \$20,000.

Studies have consistently found the EITC persuades single parents to go to work and lifts more children out of poverty than any government program. Ronald Reagan was right.

Ken Sikkema

Senate Majority Leader

Wyoming



## THE ANN ARBOR NEWS

### **Project serves twofold purpose Clothes closet provides free items to needy while workers gain skills**

Sunday, September 17, 2006

**BY STEVE RICCI**

**News Staff Reporter**

A partnership between Thurston Early Childhood Development Center in Ypsilanti Township and Washtenaw County Community Support & Treatment Services has created a donation room with clothes and household goods for infants and toddlers.

Called a clothes closet by its organizers, the room opened at Thurston in February and serves a twofold purpose: Providing free items to needy families and allowing workers with disabilities to gain job skills while giving back to the community.

The work crew at the clothes closet includes clients from the developmental disabilities unit of Community Support & Treatment Services. The unit provides respite, counseling and job training to the disabled, and works under the umbrella of Washtenaw County Community Mental Health.

The clients working at the clothes closet are transported to Thurston where they are supervised by Community Support & Treatment Services staff. Their work ranges from sorting and hanging clothes to carrying in bags of donated items and greeting customers.

"We provide a meaningful and productive day for them, to give back to the community and be integrated in the community," said Lydia Sattler, a health services supervisor with the developmental disabilities unit.

Sattler said the project also "gives the public opportunities to be exposed to folks with developmental disabilities, (to see) they can have productive and meaningful lives."

Thurston's donation room hands out several thousand pieces of clothing or household items a week, Sattler said. All of the merchandise is given away for free. Besides clothes, the items for infants and toddlers include cribs, mattresses, car seats, strollers, rockers and stuffed animals.

The donation room arose through a conversation late last year between Karyn Goven, supervisor of early childhood, Head Start, child care and community education at Thurston, and Steve Taylor, a program assistant at Community Support & Treatment Services and an adult education teacher at Thurston.

"We needed a place to do this," Taylor said. "We have a lot of families that have a lot of issues with low income."

People come to the room through multiple channels. Some are parents of children enrolled at Thurston or people taking adult education classes. Others are referred from local agencies such as Hope Medical Clinic in Ypsilanti, Planned Parenthood, The Salvation Army and SOS Community Services.

Sattler said a majority of the items in the clothes closet are donated by two main sources, individuals in the community and Once Upon A Child stores in Ann Arbor and Canton. With the permission of owners, those resale shops give unsold items to the county organization.

Community Support & Treatment Services rents a storage unit to house the donated items and its staff hopes to open more donation rooms in the county.

"We have such a surplus of stuff," Sattler said.

Taylor gives credit to several people who helped make the donation room possible, including Goven, Sattler and Trish Cortes, a program administrator at Community Support & Treatment Services. But, Taylor said, Kayla Kokalis, a Community Support & Treatment Services employee, deserves the most credit.

"Kayla has been the prime mover in this thing," Taylor said. "She has the magic. She's built the critical relationships for us."

Goven said the donation room fits well with Thurston's goal of community service. "When an opportunity like this comes along you have to grab it," she said.

Steve Ricci can be reached at [sricci@annarbornews.com](mailto:sricci@annarbornews.com) or 734-482-4685.

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